

# Potential of Ecotourism in Finland

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<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>The objective of this thesis was to examine the potential and the state of ecotourism in Finland. The research focuses on different dimensions of ecotourism business as well as the stage we are at in Finland when it comes to ecotourism business. One of the main points was also to clarify the meanings of and the differences between ecotourism, nature-based tourism and sustainable tourism.</p> <p>Desktop research was chosen as the main research method. The intention was use it to survey existing information on the topic. The research was done with the help of literature, both Finnish and foreign. In addition, Internet sources were also utilized. In the research part different aspects of ecotourism business were examined as well as how ecotourism businesses operate in other countries.</p> <p>Based on the research there are no ecotourism businesses in Finland. The terms nature-based tourism and sustainable tourism are very close to ecotourism and the research showed that the tourism companies in Finland perceive themselves as nature-based or sustainable tourism companies. The research also showed that the ecotourism business itself has several matters to consider. Ecotourism is doing well in countries such as Sweden and Norway, so it can be said that it would also have business potential in Finland.</p>			
<p><b>Keywords</b></p> <p>Ecotourism, nature tourism, sustainable tourism, entrepreneurship, business</p>			

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism has developed to be the fastest growing industry in the world. (The World Tourism Organization 2015.) As tourism industry grows, also nature-based tourism and destinations are becoming more popular when tourists choose these destinations for experiencing their beauty and fragility. In case the tourists act appropriately and with nature-friendly attitude, nature-based tourism can increase the nature protection destinations and nature protection mindset. (Baker etc. 1998, 14.)

Finland has many tourism companies working in the field of nature-based tourism but ecotourism does not seem to be one of them. I have done research and been trying to find ecotourism companies from Finland but have not succeeding in it. That is the reason a more extensive research is needed on what ecotourism actually is. The goal of this thesis is also to clarify qualifications of ecotourism in Finland and whether the tourism companies in Finland are more oriented in nature-based tourism with interest in responsible and ecological tourism than pure ecotourism.

### 1.1 Reasons for choosing this topic

Tourism has always been close to my heart especially after studying it and going more deep into its many aspects. Nowadays also nature protection and the respect for clean and healthy environment are crucially important factors when people are constantly destroying their living environment with small actions. Ecotourism as well as nature-based tourism are enjoyable ways to advance the welfare of nature and this fact should be taken more into account also in Finland. There are many countries around the world, i.e. Estonia, Sweden, Norway, Brazil and Canada, which have a very advanced state of ecotourism at the moment. I will present these countries later on in the thesis. The reason I chose to have examples of ecotourism from other countries is that I would like to see Finland taking example from these countries and further the state of ecotourism in our country too when in my opinion, Finland has the potential for it. This is why I wanted to do a research on how far Finland is from practicing pure ecotourism.

### 1.2 The situation at the moment

In Finland there already are foundations and organizations which are supporting the growth of ecotourism in Finland. Finland with its gorgeous nature has all the qualifications to practice succeeding ecotourism. Still, when it comes to Finland, we lack pure ecotourism in our country. Most of the sustainable tourism companies are more based

on nature tourism than ecotourism. There is a thin line between the definitions of ecotourism and nature-based tourism and this is what makes it very difficult to actually see the situation of ecotourism in Finland, when no one is certain about the definition and all the aspects of it.

As said, in Finland there exists nature-based tourism and sustainable tourism. The Finnish government has also created the requirements for nature-based tourism by advancing the recreational usage of different areas in Finland (Hemmi 2, 154). The government owns a bureau called Visit Finland (until December 2014 called Matkailun edistämiskeskus) which improves, develops, funds and markets the nature-based tourism business in Finland. There are also several associations functioning in Finland which take care of the nature protection and nature-based tourism either indirectly or locally. There are also national associations which take part in nature-based tourism, i.e. Finnish Unesco Committee, Birdlife Finland ry, Lomarengas Oy etc. This means our country is willing to develop its tourism towards more nature-friendly activity and constantly works towards that specific goal. Still, even though ecotourism is constantly becoming more popular all around world, in Finland it seems to be hard to develop our nature-based tourism towards ecotourism.

### 1.3 Structure of the thesis

The thesis contains introduction, research methods and deeper insight on ecotourism, nature-based tourism. After this I will get more into ecotourism business and its different aspects. In the end I will tell about successful ecotourism countries to give an example how the business works. This is the main chapter of my work. As the last chapter I have conclusions where I sum up my work and tell about my learnings.

The third part of the thesis, deeper insight on ecotourism, nature-based tourism and sustainable tourism, give information on different aspects of all of these forms of tourism. The different between these three is not that big and that is why it is important to open up these terms and their specific definitions. After understanding the small differences between these terms, it is easier to understand the whole phenomenon.

After getting familiar with the three terms mentioned in the last chapter, I will get more into the ecotourism business and how it works. More specifically I will dig into the start of an ecotourism business, all the aspects entrepreneurs need to take into account and all the help they could get from different associations.

## 2 RESEARCH METHOD

This research was done by researching the literature and webpages concerning ecotourism, nature tourism, sustainable tourism and entrepreneurship. The first intention was to interview the companies and organizations dealing with ecotourism but in Finland that is close to impossible when there does not exist pure ecotourism companies or at least I have not been able to find them. These companies are more nature-based tourism or sustainable tourism companies and that is why it was better to get more into the definitions and the fact of how close to ecotourism the tourism companies operating in Finland actually are. Through the interviews the intention was to clarify the amount of ecotourism companies in Finland. After becoming familiar with the actual definition of ecotourism I realized it is impossible to do a research on something we do not have in Finland.

### 2.1 Defining the research problem

The main goal of my thesis is to clarify the qualifications of ecotourism and existence of ecotourism in Finland. A research is done on different aspects of nature-based tourism in Finland and through that research examine how close to ecotourism nature-based tourism companies are in Finland. Another target of the research is to examine how nature-based tourism works and what factors it requires to be successful. There have been researches on nature-based and sustainable tourism which are more general when it comes to tourism in Finland. With the help of different tourism associations dealing with nature-based tourism I examined the classifications tourism companies should have to be an ecotourism company.

Other purpose of this research is to develop my own knowledge on ecotourism, since I have already studied tourism but ecotourism is one of the aspects of tourism I am not that familiar with. Through this research I examined what kinds of tourism companies practicing any kind of sustainable tourism we have in Finland and how close they are to ecotourism.

The ecotourism business in Finland is a complex topic. As said, it is hard to find information about Finnish ecotourism, even on nature-based and sustainable tourism. Due to this, it is slightly challenging to find recent sources, especially literature, concerning Finland's situation. This is the reason why this thesis will cover the different aspects and qualifications of nature-based and sustainable tourism and the situation of those



forms of tourism. It will also deal with the entrepreneurship and its requirements for success in the field of nature-based and sustainable tourism.

In this research I first got familiar with the concept of ecotourism and how does it differ from nature tourism or sustainable tourism. As material I used literature I could find and also took advantage of Internet sources of different tourism companies and associations. I also got familiarized with how ecotourism business works and what does it demand to build up a successful ecotourism company.

## 2.2 Secondary research

The research method used in the thesis was secondary research, also known as desk research. In secondary research the sources used were mainly literature and material found from the Internet. The reason for choosing secondary research as a research method was that I wanted to offer background information concerning ecotourism in Finland and also due to lack of tourism companies practicing pure ecotourism, only practicing nature-based tourism. In this situation it is better to use data that already exists. There exists plenty of foreign sources for the research of ecotourism. It was also hard to find perfectly suitable interviewees and this was the reason for choosing secondary research method.

It was slightly challenging to find fresh literature and other sources concerning the situation in Finland. By choosing the secondary research method I was able to benefit from the research material and sources around the globe. More specifically, I used the secondary data and collected the data from literature, reports and statistics.

When it comes to literature used, I was able to find one Finnish book divided in two pieces, written by Jorma Hemmi, Doctor of Philosophy from University of Lapland. Hemmi was the first person debating on tourism in Finland. (Lapin korkeakoulukonserni, 2011). Other literature used is originally from foreign countries and they discuss more about the business of ecotourism, not Finland specifically. The Internet sources used are concerning ecotourism, nature tourism and sustainable tourism from the perspective of different associations promoting and developing ecotourism. I also got help from other theses done in the last three years. These theses dealt with ecotourism, nature-based tourism and sustainable tourism in Finland and more from entrepreneurs' perspective.

The reason for using 10 years old literature was that I was not able to find more recent and as trustworthy Finnish literature on the topic. I considered the opuses of Hemmi more trustworthy and accurate source compared to the Internet sources I could find. Many pieces of work done on this certain topic before have used Hemmi as a reference and this was the reason I chose his books as the main reference of my thesis.

Another old, though not outdated, source used in this thesis is *Ecotourism Development – A Manual for Conservation Planners and Managers Volume II: The Business of Ecotourism Management and Development* by Drumm et. al. I considered this opus very useful. It is obvious that it is not as fresh as it could be but by using this together with information of digitalization advancing and influencing tourism business we can bring it to the present.

### 3 CONCEPT OF ECOTOURISM

TIES (The International Ecotourism Society) defines ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" There are three principles of ecotourism, including uniting conservation, communities and sustainable travelling. These principles make a difference between ecotourism, sustainable tourism and nature tourism. (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015.)

#### 3.1 History of ecotourism

The overuse of natural resources and pollution started to come up in 1970s and also the concern of the negative influences of tourism on environment started to grow when tourism spread to new areas where the negative influences started to show. Tourism caused losing landscapes, contamination and the destruction of vegetation and fauna. Due to these influences more specific researches on the interaction of environment and tourism. (Holden 2008, 67–68.)

In 1980 media got interested in worldwide environmental problems caused by people. The most common matters of concern were e.g. global warming, ozone layer becoming thinner and the destruction of rainforests. In 1980 also mass tourism spread from Mediterranean Sea to new destinations such as North-East part of Asia, Africa and Caribbean. This lead to examining which negative influences tourism has on developing countries, especially from environmental and cultural perspective. Due to environmental concerns several organizations were grounded, such as Tourism Concern (UK) and Ecotourism Society (USA). (Holden 2008, 68–69, 71–72.)

#### 3.2 Characteristics of ecotourism

As said, "ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel." This means, when implementing or taking part in pure ecotourism, there exists different principles to be adopted. First of all, ecotourism always minimizes the impact of any action on environment and builds environmental and cultural awareness and respect and this also includes facilities designed, constructed and operating so that they have as low impact on environment as possible. When it comes to financial benefits, ecotourism always gains benefit for both local people and private industry and through this, it also benefits financially the conservation. (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015.)

### 3.3 Advantages and disadvantages of ecotourism

As said earlier, ecotourism minimizes the negative impact as well as on the local people and the natural environment. An eco-tourist aims to minimize the negative impacts of her traveling with a special interest on the local culture and nature. Ecotourism also provides positive attitude and experience among travellers. The interest on ecotourism will benefit the local communities as the ecotourism enterprises are managed at a local level (community-based ecotourism). The members of a community are involved in every step of building ecotourism destinations and this leads to having new jobs available for people who now are not forced to leave their own community to look for a job. In the community almost everyone is able to participate, offer food or accommodation services, arrange cultural performances, sell crafts or work as a guide. As ecotourism improves in the area, it also improves the standard of living when facilities such as clinics, drinkable water sources, new roads and electricity are enhanced. There exists also organization, such as I to I Volunteering, where the volunteers help communities to advance the area as an ecotourism destination. Also government helps by funding the action in the region as it recognizes the potential of the area. Through nature conservation the environment, nature and its wildlife could be saved for future generations. (Eco India, 2008.)

In environmental conservation point of view ecotourism also brings benefit of appreciation of the world's natural resources, such as landscapes, wildlife and coral reefs. Also by paying e.g. park entrance fees and camping fees, tourists fund conservation work. As tourists travel to different regions, the heritage is preserved as the local culture, lifestyle and customs are experienced. One of the most important benefits is when e.g. hotel chains, tour operators and attraction providers start to adapt their operation with the basic principles of ecotourism. All over the world recycling, use of renewable energy sources, water-conservation schemes and safe waste disposal increase. (Simm, 2011.)

At first, ecotourism was a part of nature tourism. Over time it has become to be its own concept and nowadays the nature of the tourism depends on the tourist. Others consider ecotourism to be any kind of traveling in the nature, some consider the interest on nature to be ecotourism. This is why there does not exist any specific definition of what ecotourism actually is. This has led to that several traveling products and services

can be advertised as an ecotourism product. One example of this is snowmobile safaris. It is considered as an ecotourism product only because it is executed in the nature. (Hemmi 2005a, 354; Kalmari & Kelola 2009, 11.)

One of the disadvantages of ecotourism is pollution. Flights to different destinations releases greenhouse gas, which is why the way of traveling is advisable to be changed to less polluting option, such as train, ship, bus or bicycle. Unfortunately these traveling options are not always possible due to long distances. (Ympäristö ja kehitys ry, 2008.)

The resources gathered with the help of ecotourism do not always go to environment protection or local communities; it may also go to different companies and their managers or e.g. traveling agencies. Even though ecotourism creates new jobs for the members of the local community, their salary may be very low and the work can be very dependent on different seasons. It is harder to get the habitants to protect the nature and animals if they do not have a job or get income. (Baker ym. 1998, 15; Hemmi 2005a, 355.)

## 4 THE PRINCIPLES OF NATURE TOURISM AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Nature and sustainable tourism are almost synonyms for ecotourism. Over time these terms have diverged from each other after more specific researches. The content of these terms are almost the same with small differences. In this chapter I will go through the definition of sustainable and nature tourism and the principles of both and their situation in Finland.

### 4.1 Sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism is economically profitable tourism which does not destroy environment or local cultures. Words like 'responsible' and 'environmentally conscious' subscribe sustainable tourism well. We can talk about sustainable tourism when the economic and socio-cultural impacts are also considered. (UNEP & UNWTO 2005, 11-12.)

Sustainable tourism ensures the quality of tourism services and products by notifying the needs of the tourist as well as the destination. It also aims to avoid and decrease the negative impacts of tourism. It takes into consideration the ecological, economic, social and cultural sustainability and establishes the long-term and stable development of these sectors. (Turunen, 2010, 3.)

### 4.2 Nature tourism

As well as sustainable tourism, nature tourism is also considered to be responsible tourism which protects the environment and improves the welfare of local community. Nature tourists concentrate on natural attractions on their trip. Activities such as bird watching, photography, stargazing, camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, visiting parks, etc. are included in nature tourism. Nature tourists are interested in a rich natural, cultural, or historical experience. (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 2015.)

Nature tourism helps conserving natural areas and resources, as well as local communities and landowners. The tourism industry is dependent on nature tourists valuing the remaining natural resources. As the nature tourism becomes more important over time, the local communities have more desire to continue developing their residential area for tourists.

### 4.3 Principles of sustainable and nature tourism

WTO (World Tourism Organization) has defined the principles of sustainable tourism as follows: "The objective of sustainable tourism should be managing all the resources so that the financial, social and esthetical needs can be fulfilled and at the same time maintaining the integrity of the cultures, vital ecological processes, diversity of nature and systems maintaining life." (Hemmi, 2005a, 80)

There are three different sectors of sustainable tourism that can help recognizing the possibilities and challenges of the operational environment of an ecotourism company; environmental objectives, financial objectives and social objectives. These objectives describe the principles of sustainable tourism.

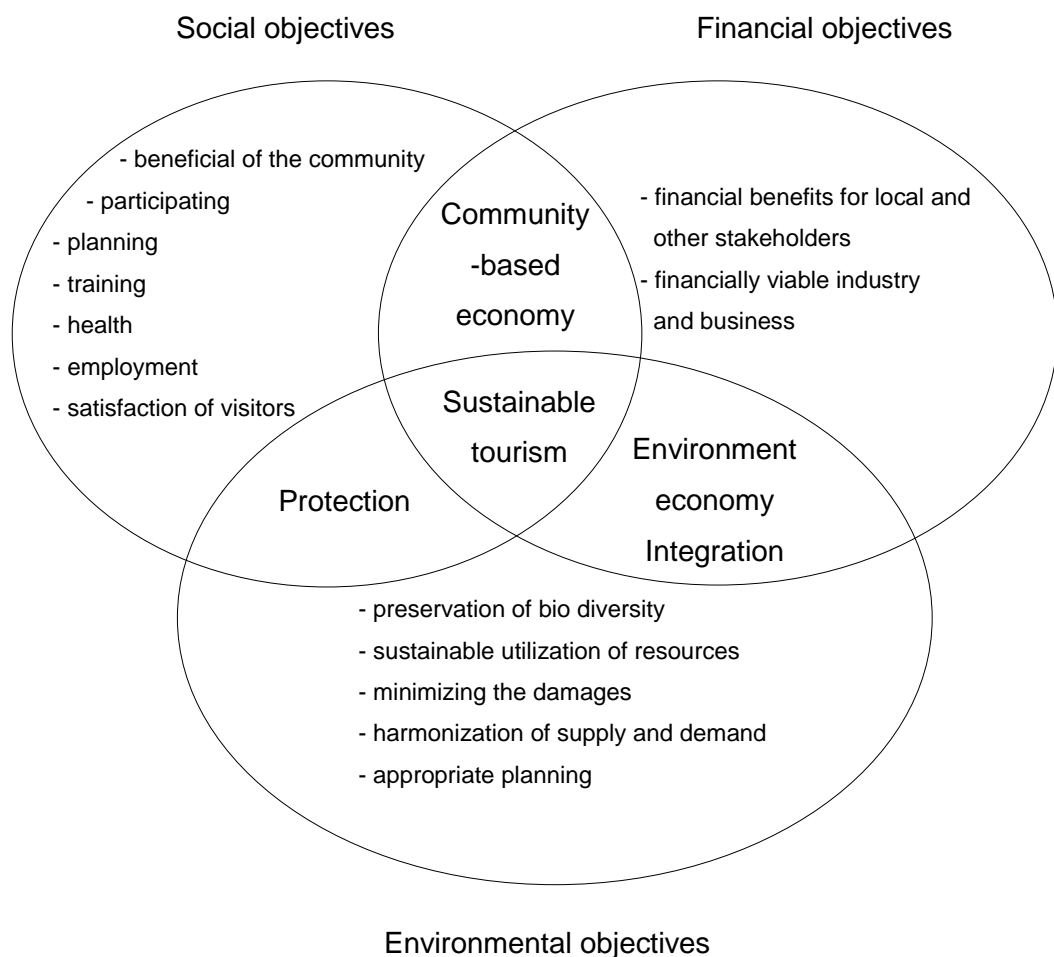


FIGURE 1. Principles of sustainable tourism (Hemmi, 2005a. 82)

#### 4.4 Defining social, financial and environmental objectives

Social objectives of sustainable tourism concern the all the actor involved in the tourism product. When it comes to the beneficial of the community, the product should involve the use of local products and services in as multiple ways as possible. Also the work force should come mainly from the local community, as an example the local tour guiding and program services. Training will affect the attitudes of the staff and obviously their good attitude will create more visitor satisfaction. With a good training the staff is able to work in a sustainable way and also teach visitors act the same way. (Hemmi 2005a, 83.)

The financial objectives will benefit the tourism area financially and therefore the area is able to offer more tourism services in the future. When using the work force of the local community, the money stays within the area and benefits the whole community. Additionally, the tourism activity in the area should provide financial benefits for conservation of the area either directly or indirectly. (Hemmi 2005a, 82.)

The main objective of ecotourism is to reduce the environmental impact of tourism on the protected area. The environmental objectives help the area to protect and maintain its nature and culture and offer tourists experiences in the future. The resources are used sustainably due to the good training of the local work force. (Hemmi 2005a, 82.)

#### 4.5 Importance of sustainable and nature tourism

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world at the moment and it also offers a job for several people around the world. Now, when one of the most discussed issues during the last decades has been the climate change, sustainable tourism becomes more popular all the time. (UNESCO 2010.)

Tourism has been known to cause pollution but the real effects on the environment and climate have been admitted not until recently. From the sustainable tourism's point of view it is important to pay attention to environmental issues but it is equally important to respect the rights of local communities, decrease the accumulation of social disadvantages and advance the even spread of traveling income between industrial and developing countries. (UNESCO 2010.)



#### 4.6 Nature and sustainable tourism in Finland

Finland is considered as a favourable place for nature tourism, when our country is developed and also safe destination for tourists. Our country is full of pure and Nordic nature which makes Finland an attractive destination for tourists coming from large cities. Nature tourism cover approximately a quarter of Finland's tourism activities and it is considered important especially for Northern and Eastern parts of Finland, as well as the archipelago. (luonnon.fi 2010.)

In Finland there exists 37 natural parks, 12 wilderness areas and multiple hiking, camping and cycling routes. The Åland archipelago is the widest one in Europe, including up to 6500 islands. All together there exists 179 584 islands in the archipelago of Finland. 10 percent of Finland's area is covered with lakes and rivers and 69 percent covered with forests. (Discovering Finland Guide Oy 2014.)

In 2003 the government of Finland decided to start a program called VILMAT. The meaning of the program was to develop the usage of recreational areas and also to develop nature tourism between 2003 and 2012. Another point of the program was to double the work placements among the field of nature tourism by the year 2010. At this point it is extremely hard to evaluate the state of nature tourism in Finland because of the lack of reporting. According to Finland's tourism strategy, the number of work placements among tourism business grew from 130 500 to 150 000 between years 2007 and 2012. (Tuunanen 2014, 1.)

## 5 ECOTOURISM AS A BUSINESS

The best places for ecotourists in Finland are the national and natural parks. The reason why these parks cannot be called as 'ecotourism destinations' is that in Finland none of the parks have entrance fee to benefit the area, nature or the local inhabitants. Still, the entrance fee can be replaced by a donation to benefit the area or its inhabitants. Then one of the principles of ecotourism is fulfilled. But when it comes to business, as stated earlier in chapter 2.3.2, the definition of ecotourism is slightly unclear in Finland. This is why many nature-based tourism companies prefer using the word 'nature tourism' when describing their business. In Finland, the field of nature-based tourism includes companies offering activities such as organized hiking, adventure trips, experience vacations etc. (Hemmi 2005a, 356.)

"The businesses that directly interacts with the ecotourist to facilitate the ecotourism experience from the planning stage through to completion" (Weaver 2001, 131). External operational environment of any company consists of different factors that need to be taken into consideration. This operational environment consists of the structure of population, financial situation, physical operational environment including nature, climate and infrastructure, and also technological, political and cultural circumstances. When it comes to ecotourism companies, there are several factor influencing the business. (Weaver 2001, 131.)

### 5.1 Types of ecotourists

There exists two different types of ecotourists, "soft" and "hard". The soft ecotourists use the services of tour operators and they have the whole trip planned by someone else than themselves. Soft ecotourists are considered to be passive and shallow travelers who have a moderate environmental commitment. They rely on travel agencies when it comes to the content of their trip. They travel with large groups and make short trips. On their trips they look for physical comfort and are physically passive. Soft ecotourists have many different purposes for their trips, not only environmental.

Hard ecotourists are those who organize their trips independently. They have a strong commitment for the environment and they aim for environmentally friendly trips. They make longer trips than soft ecotourists and are prepared to have only a few services at most. They are also prepared to challenge themselves physically and this means they are physically very active. One major difference to soft ecotourists is that hard ecotour-

ists emphasis on their own experience while the soft ecotourists emphasis on interpretation. Hard ecotourists make their own traveling arrangements because they want to travel in small groups rather than in large ones. (Weaver, 2011.)

Ecotourism is considered to be the fastest growing form of tourism in tourism industry. Even though the percentage of outbound ecotourism within a country is rather small, the high rate of growth has attracted commercial attention. (Carol Patterson 2007, 2). In tourism industry there exists several tourism companies offering sustainable or nature-based tourism due to the difficulty of defining what ecotourism is. This is why many companies offering nature-based or sustainable traveling products are marketed as an ecotourism company. (Patterson 2007, 12.)

There are five key actors playing a role in the nature-based and ecotourism industry. There actors are customers, travel agents, outbound tour operators, inbound land operators and local entrepreneurs. As stated in the chapter 5.1.1 there exists two kinds of ecotourists, soft and hard. Ecotourists can choose whether they want to organize their whole trip by themselves from the beginning or whether they want to use the services of tour operators. (Higgins 2012, 3.)

## 5.2 Planning ecotourism companies

Ecotourism has become an important element of nature tourism all around the world, offering opportunities for tourists to experience different kinds of activities happening in nature, also teaching the importance of biodiversity conservation and local cultures. Through ecotourism tourists can give their attribution to protecting the nature and giving value to the ecosystem. Ecotourism also generates direct for the conservation of protected areas and both indirect and direct income to the local stakeholders. The protected areas can be owned by either the state, private owner or community, or any combination thereof. (Drumm et al. 2004, 4.)

## 5.3 Ecotourism planning

Every ecotourism company needs to have a management plan in the beginning. There are different strategies to ensure that every act and the area used for ecotourism contributes to the conservation of the protected area. To ensure the sustainability of organized tourism, a strong and effective management program is needed. The management program should include all the stakeholders in dynamic, creative ways.

The first step on the program is planning the area for tourist use. The area should be designed so that the area used for the visitor site is planned efficiently and all the services are used the most easily, safely and effectively by the visitors. The second step is creating revenue-generating mechanisms that serve every stakeholder that participate in the process of creating an ecotourism product. The third step is for the ecotourism managers to minimize the negative impact caused by every tourist that sets a foot on the conservation area. Even though tourists are giving their contribution to conserving the nature, every tourist still has a negative impact on the area (read chapter 5). The last issue to be taken care of is well-trained and professional guides that help the visitors to experience the site in a way they would not be able to experience it on their own. This is what makes the visit and the experience unique for the tourists. (Drumm et al. 2004, 11.)

#### 5.4 Key strategies of ecotourism development

A successful business starts from a good plan, as stated in the previous chapter. When it comes to ecotourism, the entrepreneurs should use CAP (Conservation Area Planning). CAP has four different phases. These steps will help ecotourism entrepreneurs to identify the potential in their business before starting an ecotourism company. This chapter will give a more specific information of all four phases in the CAP. (Drumm et al. 2004, 62.)

##### 5.4.1 Identifying the potential

The first phase of the planning process is identifying the potential opportunity for ecotourism business. If tourism has not developed in the area, but the area still has the potential to be a tourism site, the planning process should start from preliminary site evaluation. After the preliminary site evaluation the entrepreneur recognizes if the area actually has potential to be an ecotourism site through full site diagnostics. If the area is potential for tourism, it is likely to already have tourism activity. This tourism activity is not necessarily a threat to an ecotourism company and that is why the full site diagnostics is needed to make sure ecotourism will succeed in this particular area. (Drumm et al. 2004, 62.)

#### 5.4.2 Ecotourism management planning and business planning

The second phase after full site diagnostics is ecotourism management planning and business planning. Ecotourism management planning includes six different parts; zoning, visitor site plan, sustainable design, income generation, impact monitoring and guide certifications. The business planning part consists of four different factors; feasibility study, competition analysis, marketing plan and financial projections. Feasibility study is to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the operation, competition analysis analyses all the competition happening on the area, marketing plan is to ensure the success of the company and financial projections estimates the future financial performance of the company. There are also several factors influencing the business plan. These factors can be found from the figure below. (Drumm et al. 2004, 62.)

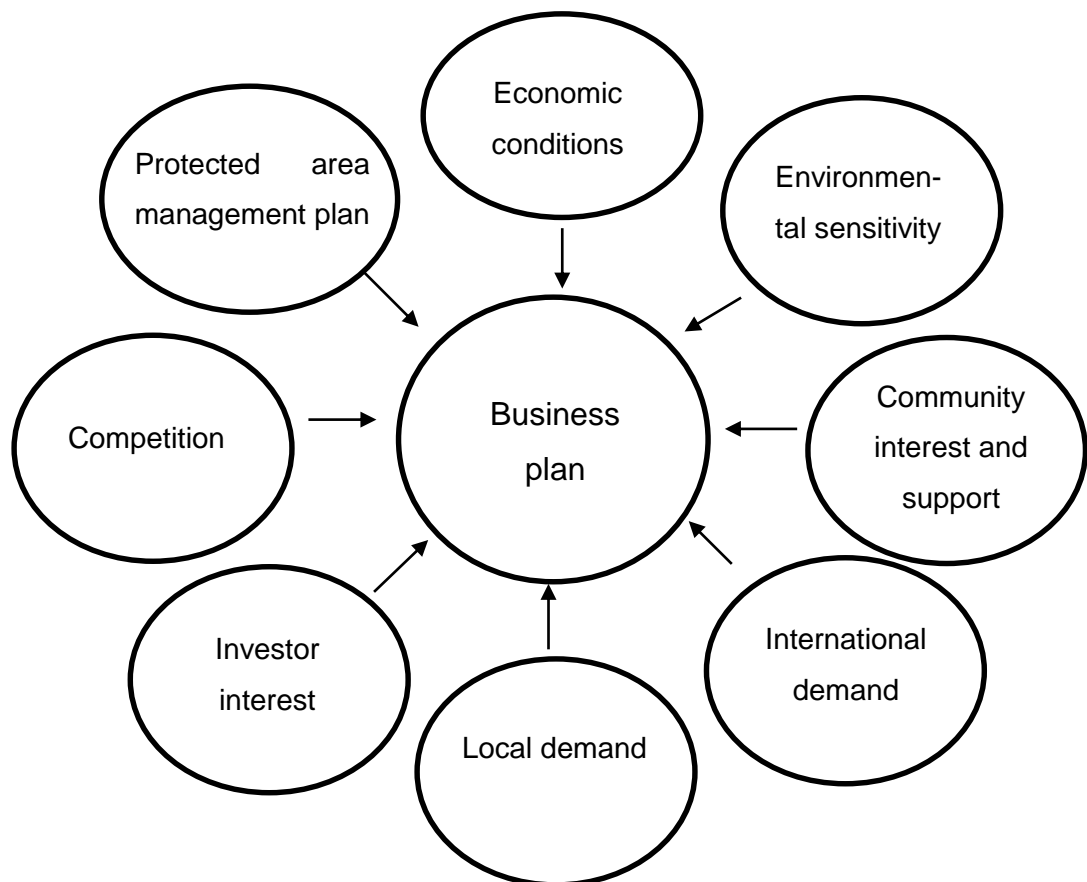


FIGURE 2. Factors influencing business plan. (Drumm et al. 2004, 64)

#### 5.4.3 Implementing the plan and development of the business

After the two phases, there is still two phases left. These phases are implementing the ecotourism management plan and developing ecotourism business on the area followed by measuring the success of the company. In developing the ecotourism business, the non-organizational organizations (NGOs) can play either a great or a small role. Some NGOs are there only as an observer and some companies offer the NGOs to take the lead in the development process. The NGOs can play a role of a facilitator between community, entrepreneur and protected area managers, it can provide its services ecotourism company or act as a trainer giving out technical information and expertise. (Drumm et al. 2004, 64-65.)

#### 5.4.4 Help of digitalization in tourism business

Tourism business in general is getting help and support from European Commission when it comes to updating the business on the present day. Digitalization is influencing all the businesses and European Commission offers support for SMEs to update their business to the digital era. Webinars are seminars organized for the entrepreneurs, helping them to market their business better online. For example the usage of Internet and social media can improve competitiveness in the field. (European Commission, 2015.)

The main goal of the program European Commission is to offer SMEs help to improve their skills in the online world and also raise awareness of developments in the smart use of technologies. The digital market offers many opportunities to increase the competitiveness of the companies and this program helps entrepreneurs to understand the potential of digital market and take full advantage of it to improve their business. European Commission aims to integrate the small businesses into global digital chain. (European Commission, 2015.)

#### 5.5 Risks of ecotourism business development

There are several risk factors in developing ecotourism business that should be taken into account. The whole industry is very complex and the nature of it is very fragmented. The market and product trends are difficult to predict due to competitive forces and demand fluctuations. Being a provider in the field of ecotourism asks for creativeness, ability to adapt quickly to customers' requirements and financial sense. (Drumm et al. 2004, 65-66.)

The risk of failing is high especially for ecotourism start-up companies when the failure rate for small companies is 80% in the first five years. Additional challenges are for example selling to distance markets, having limited access to capital and business training and dealing with greater political uncertainty but these factors influence more the developing countries. With a good safety management plan the entrepreneur can minimize several operational risks. It is also important to understand the nature of ecotourism and ecotourists. (Drumm et al. 2004, 60 & 75; Patterson 2007, 4.)

## 5.6 Trends affecting ecotourism

There are several factors affecting the tourism business and there can be seen a change especially in European outbound tourism. European tourists are now looking for exclusive, authentic and personalized holidays, which helps mainly the tourism in developing countries but applies also for ecotourism. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015a.)

As already stated, the European tourists are now yearning for new kinds of vacations. They want to have exclusive experiences instead of experiencing mass tourism destinations and they appreciate unique products and services. These travelers are looking for experiences that yield lasting memories. One of the features is the authenticity of the destinations. The travelers want to interact with the local people and this way reach for a meaningful and life-enhancing experiences. The wealth of unique cultural and natural resources is the factor fascinating the European tourists at the moment. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015b.)

Another current trend is the want to have specialized and customized vacations. The European tourists are already slightly experienced tourists and due to that, they are now looking for something new. The package holidays are now being replaced with new kinds of holidays with great flexibility. As a result of this trend, tourism entrepreneurs are now offering different kinds of holidays, including community-based and nature tourism. The largest segment for ecotourism comes from Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. These countries are the strongest markets for ecotourism within the Europe. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2015b.)

## 5.7 Economic significance of nature-based tourism

Nature-based tourism companies in Finland operate both in the summer and in the winter. They offer multiple activities, such as fishing, hunting, reindeer safaris, supervised hiking trips etc. When it comes to different researches, both singular and national researches have been done but the singular researches give more information of the impacts on economy and employment. The results of the national researches have been conflicting so far. (Hemmi 2005b, 174.)

The question is; how do we count the income of nature-based tourism, where is the limit? Do we count in the income coming from accommodation if the tourist lodges in a hotel before going in the nature? If we exclude all this and include only the economic



impacts on the nature-based tourism destination itself, the ones getting income from nature tourism are program service companies and the local shops, where tourists buy all the gear and food. The economic impacts can be significant for all the small enterprises which are taken care by the local people, and also if the tourists are independent tourists rather than taking part in package tours. (Hemmi, 2005b, 175.)

The problem when counting the economic meaning of nature tourism is that it is impossible to know which ones of the tourists are purely ecotourists and which are other tourists; they still might use the same services. The best and the clearest way to clarify the economic significance of nature tourism is to include only the money used for the services of nature tourism and exclude all of the money used outside the nature tourism area. When it comes to separating the ecotourists from the other tourists, we use the motive for the trip as a tool. It is also possible to carry out the containment by time allocation, meaning the time the tourists spends in the nature while she is awake. (Hemmi 2005b, 175-176.)

## 5.8 Development programs for sustainable tourism business

Finland has several development programs for nature and sustainable tourism, including programs for example developing agricultural tourism and developing the recreational use of nature for nature tourism. These programs are functional tools for developing the area and its operations. The programs include inter alia evaluation of the current situation, the objectives, suggestions for the procedures and also a clarification of how the objectives are achieved, meaning the strategy and tactics. It is also necessary to define all the stakeholders that are concerned. The schedule for the procedures is also needed, including the information of what is being done and until what and also the suggestions of how to arrange the funding for the development program. (Hemmi 2005b, 546.)

In 2000 the government of Finland set a target to develop the state of nature tourism in Finland and more specifically improve the usage of Finnish nature as a recreational area. (Hemmi 2005b, 553). The program and all its steps were supposed to be fulfilled by the end of 2010 but the government finished the report in 2012. The program had four main objectives which can be seen from the figure on the next page.

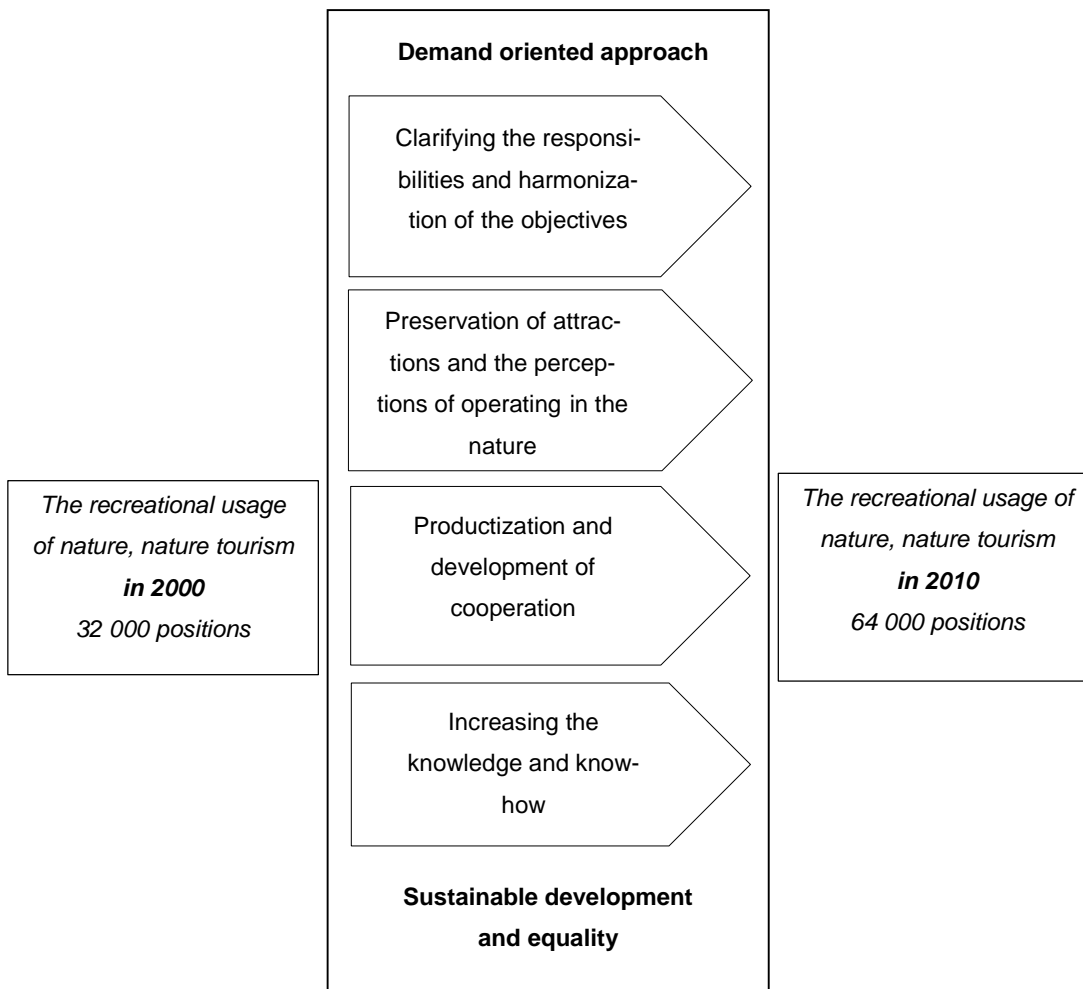


FIGURE 3. Development plan. (Hemmi 2005b, 553.)

### 5.9 Demand for ecotourism in Finland

In 2013 there was done a thesis on travel agencies offering ecotourism products. The thesis and the research done on the topic showed that every third of the Finnish travel agencies had not had any requests on ecotourism trips. There was also another research done earlier and also this research supports the fact that only a few are asking for ecotrips or sustainable trips. Also, according to the research, Finnish travelers are not familiar with the term 'ecotourism'. The only fact showing the interest of Finnish travelers towards ecotourism was that some tourists had chosen a travel agency profiled as sustainable agency. It was also stated in the research that many Finnish travelers are interested only on some part of ecotourism but not all of them. But when it comes to booking a trip with the help of a travel agent it is slightly hard to do an analysis on the amount of ecotourists when most of them are independent travelers and usually do not use travel agencies when booking a trip. (Harju, 2013. 65-66.)

## 6 NATURE-BASED TOURISM SERVICES AND ASSOCIATIONS

In Finland there exists associations for advancing nature-based tourism. These associations help entrepreneurs of nature-based tourism to improve and promote their business. Green Tourism of Finland offers a certification for nature tourism companies so the tourist wanting pure nature tourism can more easily know which companies really are nature tourism companies. European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism of Finland is another association offering tourism products for ecological travelers. The world's largest association dealing with ecotourism is The International Ecotourism Society which consists of professionals from several countries. This nonprofit organization helps organizations, communities and professionals to develop their business around the world by connecting them, offering education and sharing knowledge and resources to empower stakeholders. In this chapter I will offer more information on the association mentioned above.

### 6.1 Green Tourism of Finland

Green Tourism of Finland (GTF) is a network consisting of different nature tourism companies working for sustainable development and tourism. The network is a good option for an environmentally aware traveler who appreciates high quality, environmentally friendly and safe option. The products of GTF include accommodation, nutritional, transport and program services and are planned for both individual and group travelers.

Finnish nature, art, culture and the countryside have inspired the Finnish nature tourism products and the products are produced in ecologically, socially and culturally sustainable way. GTF also has 10 specific criteria for its members.

1. Environmental quality program and standards. The network expects an environmental quality program and standards from the members which means that services. The program should be about on-site activity including measures for energy, raw materials, water conservation, recycling and acquisitions.
2. Safety Plan. The members need also clarify their operations and the operational environment (e.g. national park or recreational area) and provide a safety plan for the network. The hospitality providers must be able to provide e.g. a first aid kit.
3. Exploitation of local resources. The hospitality providers should use the resources coming from local area if possible, e.g. work force and the provider must also prioritize use of local products, services and aim to employ.

4. Professional and sustainable communication. This means that the service provider and customers must have open communication and as well as the activity.
5. Networking and planning as a basis of business. The service provider must measure customer satisfaction regularly and they should be provided with an electric feedback form. Customer satisfaction will also be measured regularly through a written feedback form. The network wants customers to know that their feedback is recognized.
6. Support and use of public transportation. By using public transport, the service provider will act in an environmentally friendly way with possibly low impact on the environment. When customers use public transportation they are offered a provision of transfer to accommodation and back.
7. Non-motorized local transport in activities. As the service provider has activities taken place in nature, the transportation should happen with a non-motorized way (walking, cycling, canoeing, snow shoes...). People moving with wheelchairs will be allowed to use a motorized vehicle.
8. Minimization of environmental impact and respect of nature. The service provider will use only products, also including cosmetics and materials, which do not have any negative impact on the environment. On tours tourists should stay in the marked areas and trails.
9. Principle of experiential environmental education. The aim is that the customer will receive new information about nature and environment, also enthusiasm and attachment towards nature should increase.
10. Local culture. The customer will be provided with information about the local knowledge, local culture and stories. As customer wants e.g. a treatment, local products, ingredients, oils, herbs and other necessary materials are used if possible.  
(Green Tourism of Finland 2015.)

## 6.2 European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism of Finland

European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism of Finland (ECEAT Finland) is Finland's association for sustainable tourism, maintaining and developing the created network of Organic and Sustainable Tourism –project. The project provides accommodation services from organic and biodynamic farms, environmentally responsible guest houses and ecovillages and other accommodation and visitation destinations where environment protection and local culture are taken into consideration firmly.

ECEAT Finland offers many sorts of accommodation services, everything from camping to all-inclusive, from simple to luxurious. It is also possible to rent a cottage and

familiarize yourself with farm life and the environment surrounding. In several destinations tourists can also take part in every-day tasks on the farm or buy organic products.

ECEAT is an international organisation which started its activity in the beginning of 1990s. The main goal of ECEAT was to encourage farmers through tourism to continue their work and protect the environment. Today over 1000 farms in 20 different countries are part of the network. (European Centre for Ecological and Agricultural Tourism 2014.)

### 6.3 The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)

When we go outside Finland, the largest association in the world is TIES (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015). TIES is an association helping and promoting ecotourism worldwide. TIES is a program of a non-profit organization called International Tourism Collective and is working towards developing the ecotourism, providing guidelines and standards, training, technical assistance, and educational resources. It is the world's largest association in the field of ecotourism. The group of its member consist of professionals and travellers who work towards developing tourism to be a viable tool for conservation, protection of bio-cultural diversity, and sustainable community development. (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015).

With the principles of ecotourism, TIES helps organizations, communities and individuals to develop their business towards pure ecotourism. The global network of TIES has 490 organizations and 1150 professionals from over 135 countries as members. The websites offer a list of all of these organizations and professionals based on their expertise on different regions and countries. (The International Ecotourism Society, 2015.)

## 7 ECOTOURISM WORLDWIDE

As ecotourism is becoming a mainstream around the world, many organizations and magazines have listed the countries where ecotourism has already become the most important form of tourism. These countries represent the tourism destinations where the ecotourism blossoms and is appreciated by people who want to make a difference. From many listed ecotourism countries I have chosen five different kinds of ecotourism destinations, including Estonia, Sweden, Norway, Canada and Brazil.

### 7.1 Ecotourism in Estonia

When it comes to other countries in Europe, we can find a great example of ecotourism from a short distance, from Estonia. Estonia has the same strengths as Finland, about 50% of the country consists of woods and forests, including the wildlife of different animals, such as wolves, lynx and eagles. When it comes to for example birds, Estonia has one of the richest birdlives in Europe. In addition, Estonia has also plenty of different kinds of wetlands, as we have in Finland too. For ecotourists the country offers Estonian Nature Tours, birdwatching, mammal watching etc. (The International Ecotourism Society 2014a.)

Estonia has its own ecotourism association, ESTECAS (The Estonian Ecotourism Association). This association was founded in 1996, after Estonian's 2-year rural development project. ESTECAS is a non-governmental and non-profit membership organisation helping ecotourism development within the country by connecting individuals, organisations and authorities. (The International Ecotourism Society 2014a.)

### 7.2 Ecotourism in Sweden

The organization helping the protection and development of Swedish ecotourism is called The Swedish Ecotourism Society. This non-profit and non-governmental society works the same way all the other association do, offering support for Swedish ecotourism activity and is one of the largest national ecotourism associations in the world. (The International Ecotourism Society 2014b.)

Sweden offers unique destinations for ecotourists, including for example small villages of Sámi people giving an authentic Sámi experience for tourists, including the Sámi food, living, culture etc. Other experiences in Sweden are for example traveling to Piteå

archipelago and Guest House Tonedalen which protects cultural heritage, nature and beauty. (The International Ecotourism Society 2014b.)

### 7.3 Ecotourism in Norway

Norway is one well-known ecotourism destination in Scandinavia. The country advertises itself with unique landscapes, Fjords and glaciers. The slogan of Norway's tourist site is "Powered by nature", the environment is Norway's triumph. (Innovation Norway 2015). Norway does not have any specific ecotourism organizations though it has basic tourism companies, such as Høve Støtt, which organizes experiences in Norwegian nature. (Hove Stott Hallingdal AS, 2014.)

One fact that tells about the ecological side of Norway is the several UNESCO World Heritage attractions, to name a few, Rock Art of Alta (group of petroglyphs), Struve Geodetic Arc (chain of survey triangulations) and Vegaøyan, The Vega Archipelago (dozens of islands). (UNESCO 2015.)

### 7.4 Ecotourism in Canada

The Tourism Industry Association of Canada defines ecotourism as follows: "Ecotourism is a segment of sustainable tourism that offers experiences that enable visitors to discover natural areas while preserving their integrity, and to understand, through interpretation and education, the natural and cultural sense of place. It fosters respect towards the environment, reflects sustainable business practices, creates socio-economic benefits for communities/regions, and recognizes and respects local and indigenous cultures, traditions and values." (Smithsonian.com 2007.)

As the popularity of ecotourism grows, Canada has taken the chance of being one the ecotourism destinations when the country surely has potential to be one. At the moment Canada has 157 national historic sites, 42 national parks and three national marine conservation areas and the amount of land under its supervision continues to grow. As an experience Canada offers to ecotourists the vast and scenic wilderness at its best. (Smithsonian.com 2007.)

## 7.5 Ecotourism in Brazil

Brazil has many popular tourism destinations, including e.g. Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and Salvador. The country offers several different kinds of vacations and one of the most popular is ecological vacations. (Instituto EcoBrasil 2007.)

An institution called EcoBrasil was founded in 1993 and its objectives were to help developing Brazil as a reliable destination for ecotourism. The institution communicates with tourism trade conservation organizations and local communities and its mission is to develop tourism within the country with minimum impact on the environment. ((Instituto EcoBrasil 2007.)

In 1996 WWF Brazil set up Community-based Ecotourism program, which offered support for different conservation programs in Brazil. Examples of these programs are the Golden Lion Tamarin, an Atlantic rainforest near Rio and TAMAR Sea Turtle Conservation, located in Fernando de Noronha. Conservation specialists, community leaders and ecotourism specialists joined together to get the program started. (Instituto EcoBrasil 2007). Today Brazil is one of the most popular ecotourism destinations in the world and one much visited attraction is the Amazon. (International Wildlife Law 2011.)



## 8 CONCLUSIONS

The main objective of this thesis was to figure out what ecotourism actually is, what the state of ecotourism in Finland is and why do we seem to lack tourism companies practicing purely ecotourism. After working hard, I got familiarized with the term and the concept of ecotourism. When it comes to figuring out the state of ecotourism in Finland, I found out that we have many nature based tourism companies, organizations and associations but none of those defined themselves as an ecotourism company, only nature-based or sustainable. I did not get an answer to why we lack ecotourism companies in Finland. For this I would have needed a deeper research with professionals which in the end I did not find.

When getting familiar with the definition of ecotourism and different nature-based tourism there cannot be found a tourism company in Finland who defines itself an ecotourism company. Green Tourism of Finland has helped these companies to realize the meaning of acting in a sustainable way and respecting the nature. Green Tourism of Finland has also marked the companies with right policies by giving the Ecolabel after fulfilling all the criteria.

When it comes to achieving ecotourism in Finland, our country is on the right path. There are many steps to create successful ecotourism business in our country but as said earlier, in my opinion Finland has all the potential it needs. The problem now is defining the term ecotourism properly and learning the meaning of it. From that first step it is easier to start developing the nature-based and sustainable tourism a little further, to ecotourism. We have all the ingredients including the beautiful nature with all the wildlife activities our inhabitants are used to and able to make it a product.

I hope in the future I would see the development in ecotourism also in Finland. I am glad we have realized the potential for nature-based and sustainable tourism and we are, together with the government, building that kind of a tourism in Finland. As stated earlier in this thesis, the concept of ecotourism is slightly unfamiliar to Finnish tourists. There have been researches done among travel agencies but these researches show that at least Finnish tourists are not showing that much interest towards ecotourism. These researches do not tell anything about foreign tourists and their interest towards Finnish ecotourism.

Especially in this situation when we do not seem to have work placements for everyone, such business as ecotourism would help many people also financially. If Finland is capable of organizing nature-based and sustainable tourism, ecotourism should not be any different. Perhaps by raising the awareness of ecotourism among nature tourism companies in Finland, these companies would have more courage to transform into an ecotourism company.

This thesis process did not go smoothly from the beginning. I do not wonder the fact that understanding the concept of ecotourism is difficult to many. It took me several months to realize what I am talking about when I mention the word ecotourism. As said earlier, it was not easy to find trustworthy sources and more difficult was to find updated and new material about the topic. I found a few suitable sources but they were rather old. But when it comes to the chapter of ecotourism business and the source used in it, I brought it to present time by adding the opportunities digitalization has brought. By supporting one another, these sources are liable together.

The main issue I learned from writing this thesis was that Finland has the potential for such kinds of tourism as ecotourism. We have plenty nature-based and sustainable tourism in our country but we still lack either ecotourism or the awareness of ecotourism. After getting familiar with ecotourism happening especially in Sweden, Estonia and Norway, it is easy to see the potential of Finland as an ecotourism company. When starting the thesis I thought this topic would be quite easy as I have studied tourism but this whole, long process showed that tourism can actually be quite complex too. I am very glad I chose ecotourism in Finland as a topic because this was that kind of tourism I was not familiarized before. I also learned that when it comes to tourism, it is not formed only of companies offering tourism products but also different associations and operator advancing the business of tourism companies.

As a whole, this thesis process was very interesting when I got deeper to the subject. Finding many forms of sustainable tourism and all the layers of especially ecotourism was fascinating. This whole process was very useful to me as I am specialized also in tourism and business in general. Even though I did not find what I was really after, I am very pleased with my work.

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